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Lab Demo 5th Cycle shows successes

by **Katherine Gleason, AFRL Public Affairs**

WRIGHT-PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Ohio —The quality of the scientists and engineers working for the Air Force Research Laboratory is one of the main reasons that AFRL is able to continually provide our country's warfighters with timely and innovative technology. In an effort to build and to maintain this exceptional workforce, AFRL is testing the Laboratory Personnel Demonstration Project (Lab Demo) as a way to ensure that scientists and engineers are being appropriately compensated for their contributions to the mission.

Members of the Lab Demo Team visited the AFRL directorates this summer to brief the results of the Lab Demo's fifth cycle. Their goal is to increase awareness of the successes and benefits of Lab Demo. Approximately 2,300 scientists and engineers are covered under the program.

"We try never to say no to a Demo presentation request," said plans and programs engineer Laura Leising, who presented the briefings. "This summer, the Lab Demo Team presented the fifth cycle results to five directorates and HQ."

The purpose of Lab Demo is to free scientists and engineers from the constraints of the Civil Service Personnel system. Lab Demo works to ensure that all of AFRL's scientists and engineers are compensated appropriately according to their individual contributions. As early as 1987, there were recommendations to change the personnel system for all scientists and engineers in the Department of Defense laboratories. The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 1995 authorized the demonstration project authority, which provided AFRL with the ability to make these changes.

Lab Demo is an ongoing personnel experiment that involves the implementation and testing of a number of initiatives designed to benefit AFRL's scientist and engineer community. These initiatives include:

1. Simplified Job Classification—allows supervisors to create and classify positions using a one-page description of duties, which allows better management of the workforce;
2. Broadbanding—traditional GS levels are replaced with four "bands;"
3. Contribution-based Compensation System (CCS)—measures an individual's contributions to the organization's mission and ties those contributions to salary adjustments;
4. Voluntary Emeritus Corps—allows retired/separated employees to return to work at the lab on a voluntary basis;
5. New Development Opportunities Program—provides additional career growth opportunities;
6. Lab Commander Award Authority—provides the Lab Commander authority to approve high-dollar cash awards to recognize deserving employees;
7. Federal Employees Pay Comparability Act (FEPCA)—provides the Lab Commander authority to approve relocation bonuses, recruitment bonuses, and retention allowances;
8. Extended Probationary Period—expanded to three years instead of one.

Results from the fifth cycle of Lab Demo showcase the benefits of the program. The data shows that over 82 percent of AFRL's scientists and engineers are equitably compensated based upon their contribution to the organization's mission. This is up from approximately 65 percent in 1997. Additionally, the CCS allows for a wide range of compensation adjustments. The average increase for this cycle was just under six percent and the maximum increase was almost 32 percent.

"Lab Demo provides an effective strategy for dealing with the potentially sensitive issues of under- and over-compensation," said Leising.

AFRL's Lab Demo project recently reached its five-year decision point. This is a significant milestone, as at this point the project can be permanently implemented, renewed for an additional three to five-year test period, or terminated. Although the program has been very successful, there are additional initiatives that would provide even more flexibility in managing our workforce. As a result, Gen. Nielsen has recommended continuation as a demo for an additional test period.

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“There are still improvements to be made in the program,” said Leising. “For example, the new development opportunities program is not being taken advantage of by a large number of lab personnel. I believe that if we continue to get the message out about all of the Lab Demo initiatives, people will better understand the benefits it can afford them, and make better use of the system.”

For more information on Lab Demo, contact the Demonstration Project Team at (937)904-9600. @